



Ü ཡུལ་

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Best Monastery Koras

- ➔ Tsurphu Monastery kora (p95)
- ➔ Tashi Dor Kora (p97)
- ➔ Reting Monastery Kora (p101)

Best off the Beaten Track

- ➔ Sili Götsang Hermitage (p100)
- ➔ Samtenling Nunnery (p101)
- ➔ Drak Yangdzong Caves (p110)
- ➔ Gongkar Chöde Monastery (p106)

Why Go?

Ü is Tibet's heartland and has almost all the landscapes you'll find across the plateau, from sand dunes and meandering rivers to soaring peaks and juniper forests. Due to its proximity to Lhasa, Ü is the first taste of rural Tibet that most visitors experience, and fine walking opportunities abound, from day hikes and monastery koras to overnight treks.

Ü is also the traditional power centre of Tibet, and home to its oldest buildings and most historic monasteries. The big sights, such as Samye, are unmissable but consider also heading off the beaten path to places like the Drak and Öñ Valleys, or to smaller monasteries like Dranang and Gongkar Chöde. Make it to these hidden gems and you'll feel like you have Tibet all to yourself.

When to Go

- ➔ Nam-tso gets very busy in July and August so consider visiting in late April or May. The lake remains frozen from November until May.
- ➔ Pilgrims converge on Tsurphu in May/June to take part in a festival of *cham* dancing, the unfurling of a huge *thangka* and epic bouts of Tibetan-style drinking games.
- ➔ Festival season at Samye Monastery is in June/July. Time your trek from Ganden to end in the middle of the festivities.



Ü Highlights

① Taking a scenic river journey across the Yarlung Tsangpo to the spectacular circular complex of **Samye** (p111), Tibet's first monastery.

② Visiting Yarlung Valley, the cradle of Tibetan civilisation, stopping at the iconic **Yumbulagang** (p119), ancient **Trandruk Monastery**

(p118) and the ruins of **Rechung-puk** (p121).

③ Squeezing, dragging and pushing yourself through the sacred cave complexes of **Drak Yangdzong** (p110), an